

Old Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103952
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	308469
Inspection dates	20–21 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Lois Furness

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pauline Riley
Headteacher	David Green
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	Lawrence Lane Cradley Heath B64 6DR
Telephone number	01384 569213
Fax number	01384 413216

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this average-size school most pupils are White British, although there are ten other ethnic backgrounds represented. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This improving school provides a satisfactory education. Pupils say the school has improved over the last year, appreciating the way the curriculum has been adapted to make it more interesting. Theme weeks are looked forward to and pupils spoke enthusiastically about 'Space Week' when they made many interesting things, including a 'time machine'! These activities promote pupils' enjoyment and prompted pupils to say, 'School is fun, active and enjoyable.' Developing pupils' understanding of leading a healthy lifestyle is given a high priority. The well-attended sports clubs support pupils' understanding of the importance of regular exercise. 'Eating healthily is important. You must eat five fruit and vegetables every day' is a typical comment made. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and speak confidently of what to do if bullying occurs. Responsibilities, for example, as school council members, develop pupils' understanding of the importance of the community. Pupils proudly support different charities, saying it is important to care for others less fortunate than themselves. Parents also say their children enjoy school and comment positively on the interesting curriculum and the way visits and visitors 'make it come alive'.

Although the curriculum has been adapted well to provide interest for pupils, it is less successful in ensuring that learning is as good as it should be. Standards in the past have been too low because of unsatisfactory teaching. With the support of the local authority, school leaders have taken firm action and standards have improved, although they remain below average in English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory achievement from when children first start school in the Nursery. Progress is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage, the Nursery and Reception but weaknesses in children's knowledge of letter names and sounds, writing and calculation skills slow down their rate of learning in Years 1 and 2. New teaching methods have recently been introduced to raise standards in these aspects of children's development; however, it is too early to see their effect.

Throughout the school, teachers are good at sharing with pupils the intended learning of the lesson. They use a variety of strategies, including the use of 'talk partners' to encourage all pupils to talk about their work. Pupils enjoy these opportunities to work together and respectfully listen to each other's ideas. Improving standards and good personal skills show pupils' satisfactory preparation for the next stage of their education.

Although pastoral care is good and pupils feel safe and well cared for, academic guidance is not as successful. Systems for assessing pupils' progress are satisfactory and school leaders regularly check how well pupils are progressing. However, the use of assessment information is not rigorous enough to ensure that progress is maximised. There is good marking of pupils' work, but this is not consistent and pupils do not know sufficiently well what they need to do to make their work better. Also, checking procedures do not sharply identify what teachers must teach to raise standards further. Even so, improvements made over the past year, in improving achievement and standards and making teaching more effective, show leadership and management are satisfactory and the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

When children enter the Nursery, their skill levels are well below those expected for their age. Progress is satisfactory, although by the end of Reception the great majority of them are

working below the goals expected in all six areas of learning. There are marked weaknesses in children's knowledge of letter names and sounds, in their writing skills and in the calculation aspect of mathematical development. Consequently, children are not sufficiently prepared academically for the Year 1 curriculum. New ways of teaching these skills have been recently introduced, but it is too early to gauge their effect.

Children are better prepared in their personal, social and emotional development because of the good emphasis that is given to this aspect of development. Children are happy and settled and enjoy their activities. Staff interact sensitively with children, making sure they feel safe and well cared for. There is an appropriate balance between child-led and teacher-directed activities and the outdoor environment is used satisfactorily to promote learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science by making effective use of assessment information and involving pupils in understanding how to improve their work.
- Accelerate the progress of children in the Foundation Stage in knowing letter names and sounds, writing and in developing simple calculating skills.
- Sharpen checking procedures to give teachers clearer information about how to improve pupils' learning.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

In recent years, standards have been well below average and achievement has been unsatisfactory. This was a consequence of unsatisfactory teaching. However, the unsatisfactory teaching has been eradicated. This, and the influence of initiatives such as the implementation of a new reading scheme, a more effective way of teaching writing and a greater emphasis on problem-solving, has resulted in improved progress throughout the school. Standards are now below average in English, mathematics and science, and achievement is satisfactory. Results in the Year 6 tests in 2007 show good evidence of this improved progress, with the challenging targets set for this group of pupils exceeded in both English and mathematics. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory as a result of the well-targeted support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school, although attendance is below average. Despite the efforts of the school to rectify this, a small minority of pupils do not attend as regularly as they should. Behaviour is good and pupils report there is little bullying or disruption in lessons. They know how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school. Pupils' good understanding of a healthy lifestyle is shown by them joining wholeheartedly in exercise and choosing healthy options at lunchtime. They think the school council is worthwhile and proudly speak about the improvements to the playground that council members have instigated.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a particular strength, with pupils demonstrating compassion towards those less fortunate than themselves through their numerous

fundraising activities. They know people from different ethnic backgrounds live in Britain and they speak maturely about racism. 'We are all unique,' said one pupil, while another said, 'We deal with racism by wearing the big C. That means be confident in being different!'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils are eager to learn and work hard because of good relationships between staff and pupils. Behaviour is managed well and teachers provide clear explanations about what pupils are expected to learn in lessons. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to make lessons exciting and strategies such as 'talk partners' are used well to ensure all pupils have the opportunity to share their ideas. Teachers plan conscientiously and try hard to make learning interesting. However, assessment information is not used carefully enough to ensure that activities are tailored exactly to meet pupils' learning needs. Consequently, pupils do not consistently make the progress of which they are capable. Teaching assistants satisfactorily ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included well in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has done much to make the curriculum interesting. Pupils, and boys in particular, say how much they enjoy theme weeks when they work on a variety of different practical activities. These include cooking and measuring in the 'All about Me' theme week, and making models during 'Space Week'. Visits and visitors also add further interest to the curriculum. Although subject leaders for English, mathematics and science have made improvements, for instance, by offering more problem-solving opportunities in mathematics, less attention has been given to ensuring that activities fully meet the different learning needs of pupils. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular clubs. Sport is provided for well, but there are few other extra-curricular opportunities. The Breakfast Club is popular, making a good contribution to pupils' personal well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The good relationships between pupils and staff reflect the positive ethos of the school. Parents agree that pastoral care is good and children are safe in school. The procedures for safeguarding pupils, including those for child protection, are good. These, and the school's good links with external agencies and other schools, contribute effectively to pupils' well-being and to their understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Academic guidance for pupils is not as helpful. Pupils do not have targets to help them to improve their work and marking does not consistently tell them what is necessary to achieve a higher standard in their work. There is regular checking of pupils' progress, but not enough use is made of assessment information to plan what pupils need to learn next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Recognising that standards pupils attained were not as good as they should be the leadership took firm action. With the good support of the local authority effective changes were implemented that have led to improved achievement and more effective teaching and learning. However, there is still much to do to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress in their learning.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the school improvement plan identifies the need to raise standards in English, mathematics and science. However, the plan does not make clear exactly what it is necessary to do to raise standards further. Activities to check learning, such as the analysis of pupils' work, do not provide teachers with specific information about how to make learning better. Governors are supportive and are taking a more active role in monitoring pupils' standards and achievement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Children

Inspection of Old Hill Primary School, Cradley Heath, B64 6DR

Thank you for making Mr Groves and I so welcome when we inspected your school recently. As you know, we came to see how well the school is doing and how you are getting along with your learning. We found the school gives you a satisfactory education and everyone is working hard to make it better.

Some good things are happening, especially the way your teachers make the curriculum so interesting for you. We think theme weeks are a great idea and understand why you enjoy school. We are glad to know you try hard to take regular exercise and eat healthily. You know how to keep safe, both in and out of school, and it was interesting to find out how much you knew about the dangers of smoking, drugs and of the internet.

The school takes good care of you and we are pleased you feel safe in school. We think the school council and 'playground buddies' do a good job. The council members have certainly made the playground much better and we agree when some of you said the next job is to clean up 'The Grove'. You know the importance of thinking about other people who do not have as much as you do. You should be proud of all the support you give to different charities.

We think your teachers try hard to help you learn in an interesting way. We like the way you talk to each other about your ideas. We think that learning is getting better but we think teachers could do more. Therefore, we have asked them to make sure they use the information about what you know already to carefully set you work that is at the right level. Also, we think they should give you more information about how you yourselves can improve your work. We think teachers in the Foundation Stage should help children to learn the names and sounds of letters, get better at writing and use numbers to solve very simple problems. We have also asked your headteacher to check more carefully what things will really help to raise standards in English, mathematics and science and share this information with teachers.

You can help too by continuing to do your best and by asking your teachers how you can make your work even better.

Thank you again for your help and keep on working hard.

Yours faithfully

Lois Furness Lead inspector

24 September 2007



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Lead inspector